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SUBJECT: SURVEY OF ITALIANS' VIEWS ON FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

Introduction and Summary

1. Against the backdrop of April's national elections and a four-year drop in foreign assistance, Inter Press Service News Agency reported the results of a recent survey February 17 indicating most Italians favor using Italian budgetary resources to fight global poverty, rather than increasing military or health care spending in Italy. Most respondents also indicated politicians in the on-going electoral campaign should outline their plans to fight global poverty. Separately, opposition candidate Roman Prodi has committed to a five-fold increase in foreign assistance over the next several years. While we cannot attest to either the randomness of the sample, or to the polling methodology itself of the Millward Brown Delfo poll, we can say that four Milan-based polling organizations separately claim that foreign policy has little or no impact on elections. We nonetheless report the results of this poll as an indication that some in Italy take seriously Italy's abysmally low foreign assistance, including the Opposition. When measured as a percentage of GDP, Italy's 2004 foreign assistance was the lowest in the OECD. End Introduction and Summary.

Survey Shows Italians Value Italy's Foreign Assistance.

2. (U) A recent survey indicates that many voters believe fighting global poverty is important, and would like political platforms that outline support for foreign assistance. The survey, conducted by Millward Brown Delfo in December 2005, and commissioned by Coordinamento Italiano Network Internazionali, a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) network, asked 1,000 Italians ten questions on Italy's international assistance.

3. (U) Most (79%) respondents reported electoral campaigns should outline plans to combat global poverty, and 55% of respondents would be positively influenced by a candidate committed to fighting poverty. If given the choice between spending a Euro on military spending or on reducing global poverty, 92% of Italians surveyed choose to spend the Euro on reducing global poverty. The survey also found that 70% of Italians would prefer to spend a Euro on reducing world poverty, rather than on health services in Italy.

Italy's Foreign Assistance: An Election Issue?

4. (U) When Prime Minister Berlusconi came to power in 2001, Italy spent 0.20% of its Gross National Income (GNI) on foreign assistance. Cuts in assistance have since been gradual, but consistent. In 2006, Italy will devote only 0.12% of its GNI to international aid, one-third of the European Union average.

5. (U) Left-center opposition candidate Romano Prodi is using the decline in assistance during Berlusconi's tenure as an electoral campaign issue. According to the Inter Press News Service Agency article, he has committed to increasing foreign assistance to 0.7% of GNI within the next several years.

6. (U) PolOff also met March 2 and 3 with four separate Milan-based polling organizations; each claimed that foreign policy has little to no impact on elections.

Comment

7. (SBU) We cannot attest to either the polling methods or randomness of the sample for the Millward Brown Delfo poll. Further, while it may be interesting to note that most respondents of this poll want an increase in Italy's foreign assistance, it may be doubtful, as the Milan-based polling organizations point out, that politicians campaigning on this issue would win more votes, should campaign planks include promises for foreign assistance increases. We report these findings as an indication, however, that some in Italy have noticed Italy's abysmally low foreign assistance, including

the Opposition. End comment.
SPOGLI